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PROF. D. W. C. DUNCAN'S ANALYSIS OF THE
CHEROKEE LANGUAGE.

BY C. L. WEBSTER.

TO classify and define the words of an Indian tongue, to ascertain and codify its mysterious laws of expression, and, by means of literary associations, so wed it to our own as to give it a guarantee of prospective existence commensurate with that of the English, has hitherto been regarded as one of the most difficult problems in the science of language.

Prof. D. W. C. Duncan, of Charles City, Iowa, is one of the few men that have ever had the courage to undertake such a work, and the still fewer that have enjoyed a fitness for its execution. The language which he now has in the crucible of reduction is the Cherokee. By the accidents of birth, the tongue he is dealing with is, in one sense, to him a familiar vernacular. Besides this natural advantage, he enjoys that of a finished classical education, together with an instinctive taste for linguistic research, especially in the more remote and hitherto untrodden fields of that kind of learning.

He says, "Human language is not always and necessarily *expressive*; it is sometimes in the main only *suggestive*. Where there is an affluence of thought, there is a corresponding wealth in the means of expression. In that case, language naturally becomes much more elaborate and complicated in its structure. But in the lower grades of social life, where the sphere of ideas is small, there exists but little motive for linguistic improvement. The words are generally few in number, and limited in meaning. Many of them indeed can hardly be called *words*; they are more like unintelligible exclamations, whose office it is, not to imprint an idea, or a thought, upon the apprehension of the person addressed, as do the words of a cultured tongue; but rather to arrest the attention and direct it to the subject in hand, leaving the desired impressions to arise in his mind as the result of his own observation and reflection. In these rudimentary tongues

sentences are to be found very often in but an embryonic state. They are concise and extremely simple in structure. The great periods which seem so formidable to the stranger, will be found, when analyzed, to consist mainly of simple sentences of co-ordinate rank linked together, by implied or expressed connectives."

Besides the above general features, we are told by Prof. Duncan that the Cherokee is also characterized by a peculiar disregard for the distinct individuality of its words. In practice, they are often brought together and so consolidated as to give a whole sentence the brevity and consistency of a single word. Nor does the process of agglomeration always stop exactly at the point of mutual contact; the words often meet and mingle, like two drops of fluid, so thoroughly disguising the identity of each as to baffle the discernment of all except an expert in the use of the tongue. He illustrates as follows:

"Take the word-sentence *nēwē* (thou sayest). Released from the bonds of synthesis, it stands thus: *nē hē wē*; *nē*, an obsolete prefix; *hē*, thou; *wē*, say. Had any other consonant stood in the place of *h*, a fusion of the first two syllables could not have occurred. That letter being only an attenuated aspirate, the two adjacent vowels are regarded as standing in actual contact, a predicament for vowels which is strictly forbidden by the laws of the language. Hence the form of condensation: *n(ē h) ē wē = nēwē*.

Again, word-sentence: *taṡwālōgā*; (do thou write them). Expanded, *tē hē aṡwālōgā*,—*tē*, a prefix denoting the plurality of the object of the verb, and may be translated by the pronoun *them*. Here *h* being regarded as incompetent as a separatrix, three vowels come in contact. To relieve this misadventure, to maintain the euphony of the sentence, and to conform to the law forbidding a hiatus, contraction is effected thus: *t(ē hē) aṡwālōgā = taṡwālōgā*. It is noticeable that the pronoun in this case entirely disappears; and the fact that *hē* (thou) is the subject of the verb, is only made known by its absence.

An exceptional method of contraction is illustrated by the word-sentence, *hnātōgā*, (do thou); expanded, *hē nātōgā*; *h(ē)nātōgā*.

There are six vowels in the Cherokee language, *ā ē ī a o ó*; and twelve consonants, *d g h k l m n q s t w y*. Every syllable ends with a vowel; and this rule covers all cases where the syllable consists of a single vowel.

The general law of contraction may be stated thus:

When a vowel comes in contact with another vowel, the one preceding is dropped; and the consonant of the preceding syllable unites with the following vowel, forming a new syllable.

It is obvious from what has been said, that the pronoun *hē* (thou) may take as many different forms as there are vowels. *Hē* is the original form; the others are derived as follows:

1. *Hēnānōgawēskā*; expanded, *Hē nānōgawēskā*.
2. *Hē ālāhógā*; contracted, *Hālāhógā*.
3. *Hē ādāhógā*; contracted, *Hādāhógā*.
4. *Hē astó*; contracted, *Hastó*.
5. *Hē ogatā*; contracted, *Hogatā*.
6. *Hē otanóhā*; contracted, *Hótanóhā*.

That is to say, the pronoun *hē* may be heard in conversation under six different forms: *hē, hā, hā, ha, ho, hó*, in addition to the many other guises which it may assume upon contraction with certain other words and prefixes that *precede* it, as we have above shown."

Prof. Duncan adds in this connection: "Now when we reflect that all the pronouns, more than fifty in number, with adverbs, modal auxiliaries, tense-endings, and a large family of numeral and personal prefixes (some of them obsolete), are never, or seldom, seen or heard of, except in these condensed forms of expression; and that each of these words is liable to assume any one of six different forms, according as it may happen to be touched, fore or aft, by the initial or terminal vowel of a neighboring syllable, in every case giving the whole word-sentence a new, strange and unexpected aspect, it is easy to appreciate the importance of a thorough mastery of the rules by which these myriad changes are effected; indeed, without such mastery, any progress in a scientific knowledge of the Cherokee tongue would be utterly impracticable."

Among the curiosities of Cherokee etymology, those pertaining to the pronoun are specially curious and interesting. Prof. Duncan says :

"The properties of the pronoun are chiefly person and number; though case is not altogether ignored. In English, the pronoun *we* may have a variety of applications; it may include the first and third persons, excluding the second; or the first, second and third; or the first and second, excluding the third; or the first and third, excluding the second. The Cherokee pronoun has a different form for each of these ideas; in some cases, *two* forms for the same idea. The *last two* ideas, in Cherokee, are dual in number. Thus :

1. { Ātsē- , (1 + 3—2); derived forms, atsā- , atsā- , atsa- , atsō- , atsó- ,
 Ākē- , (1 + 3—2); " " akā- , akā- , aka- , ako- , akó- ,
2. { Ētē- , (1 + 2 + 3); " " ētā- , ētā- , ēta- , eto- , ětó- ,
 Ēkē- , (1 + 2 + 3); " " ekā- , ekā- , eka- , eko- , ekó- ,
3. Ānē- , (1 + 2—3); " " ānā- , ānā- , āna- , āno- , ānó- ,
4. Āstē- , (1 + 3—2); " " astā- , astā- , asta- , asto- , astó- ,

2d Per. Sing.

Hē (thou), derived forms, hā- , hā- , ha- , ho- , hó- .

2d Per. Plu.

Ētsē- , (you), derived forms, etsā- , ētā- , etsa- , etsō- , ětso- .

2d Per. Du.

Ēstē- , (you, 2), derived forms, estā- , estā- , esta- , esto- , ětso- .

Ā- , or Ō- , (he), 3d Per. Sing.

{ Ānē- (they), 3d Per. Plu., derived forms, ānā- , āna- , āno- , ānó- .
 { Ōnē- " " " " onā- , onā- , ona- , ono- , onó- .

Each of these pronouns may be converted into the reflexive form by suffixing the syllable dā , thus, Ōdā- , (himself); Hādā- , (thysself); Ākēdā- , (ourselves).

Besides these *simple* pronouns, there are a few compounds which bespeak two different persons at the same time, said persons being in different cases. The English sentence, "You help me," would stand in Cherokee thus: Skēstālō . Here the pronoun skē- , carries the meaning of both English words, (*you-me*.) Skē- , original; derived forms, squā- , squā- , squa- , squo- , squó- .

In the same way, gó-, (I-thee); gókē-, (they-me); ākē-, (he-me); tsó-, (I-you); ētsó-, (we-you); gówānē-, (they-them); and some others.

In view of such an array of pronominal forms, and knowing there is more to come, the learner is apt to faint with discouragement; but when he takes into the account the fewness of the *original* forms, together with the unvarying rhythm that marks the formation of the derived forms, it will be sensibly felt that it is no more of a task to master the Cherokee pronoun, than the same part of speech in Latin, or even English."

In reference to Cherokee lexicography, Prof. Duncan further remarks:

"In order that a word may be defined, it is necessary that it should be identified; yet it is a singular fact that no Cherokee can recognize the words of his own language (with small exception), even when seen in print or heard in conversation; though he may actually wield them with the tongue of an orator, or the pen of a poet. The cause of this is the fact that the Indian mind is trained to deal, not with single ideas, but with thoughts, or at least with groups of ideas. The Cherokee is not aware that his language can afford any word for *hand*; it is always *Äquayānē* (my hand); that is, the idea of *hand* is always attended, in expression, with a conception of the one to whom it belongs. Now if we should resolve this word, and assign to each idea its respective part, it would stand thus: *Äquā ayānē* (my hand). Yet if these words should pass under the eye of a Cherokee who was not skilled in the science of his language, he would doubtless fail to recognize them, and be apt to repudiate them as something foreign to his native vocabulary.

While what we have here said is largely true in reference to the nouns, it is much more so as to the verb. The Cherokee never expresses the idea of an action, except in connection with that of the actor, and often of the person acted upon. And the adjective, in expressing a quality, seldom loses sight of the object to which it belongs.

Hence the first and most arduous part of the Cherokee lexicographer's work is to identify the words to be defined. Let it be

our desire, for instance, to register and define the Cherokee word meaning the same as the English word *write*. It is to be doubted if it was ever heard or written except in some such conglomeration of vocables as *Wětsóyawālānātēyē*. Now to find the word of which we are in quest, this word-sentence will have to be resolved into its component elements thus :

We¹-tsó²-y³-awāl⁴-ā⁵-nā⁶-tēyē⁷. We may then define as follows :

1. Wē-. *adv.* Thither ; indicating motion.
2. Lsó-. *pro.* I—you ; carrying the meaning of two pronouns.
3. Y-. A letter inserted for the sake of euphony.
4. Awāl-. v. t. *Write, draw, inscribe.*
5. Ā-. Tense sign, indicating the present tense.
6. Nā-. Mode sign, showing that the action affects *rational* beings.
7. Tēyē-. Sign of the infinitive mode.

It were easy to extend these illustrations of the work before us, without impairment of interest, or much danger of exhausting the source from which they are derived ; but we are admonished by the limits of this article that the foregoing must suffice.

As touching the questions of ethnological science, there is no field of research more instructive than that of human language. The mind is the measure of the man ; and so it is the essential personality of a race or a nation. The remains of art which a departed people leave behind them may suffice to give us a pretty clear idea of what they could do ; but if we would know them as they were, we must needs study them through the medium of their tongue.

The few fragmentary Indian tribes that still remain are the custodians of a very rich store of linguistic material, the value of which, as data for scientific contemplation, cannot be easily over-estimated. Not one of these tongues, however, can be expected to survive for a great while, except by the interposition of some friendly hand to save it from extinction. A fact like this can not be regarded by the scientist but with feelings of the deepest concern ; for if it is desirable (and there can be few things that are more so) that an intelligible specimen of the red man's language

shall be preserved in the interest of science, the present is about the last opportunity that will ever be offered for the discharge of such a service. The time for a work of this kind, owing to the rapid decay of these Indian tongues, is necessarily short, and it should be diligently improved.

In order that a language may be of the greatest possible use as matter of reference in the establishing of scientific truth, it is not enough to be conversant with only a few of its more prominent features; it should be understood as a whole with entire familiarity. To this end it should be rendered as easy of access as possible by means of suitable guide-books of study. In a word it should, like a classic tongue, be reduced to a state of implicit subserviency to the will of any one who might have occasion to master its use or appeal to its facts.

A very serious want of this kind has long been felt, especially with reference to the aboriginal languages of this continent. The work which Prof. Duncan now has on hand is unique and thoroughly original, as well as rigidly scientific. When finished, it will, without doubt, constitute one of the most exact and exhaustive treatises on Indian philology that has ever been published. It will have the effect to rescue at least one of our many Indian tongues, the Cherokee, from oblivion; and by investing it with an intelligible immortality, make it an interesting fact for reference among students of philology for all time to come.

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